With gold-tipped fingers

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With gold-tipped fingers

by DonnieTZ

Summary

Will is twenty-one and his peculiar powers are barely contained, so it's time for him to leave Jack's coven and begin his year of mentorship in Doctor Lecter's one.
But is Lecter really interested in helping him to contain his darkness, or is he trying to unleash it and see what happens?

A new kind of magic reaches out and brushes against his. It's dark, but it doesn't scare him. Or maybe just a little bit. It feels like something that can be dangerous but chooses not to, a deep lake in the middle of the woods at night, not to venture in but to admire from a distance. Will looks at the knives to resist the urge to gorge on it, drink it all in, drown in it.
But he reaches too because it's too tempting. He pushes his magic in a tentative caress, slow and steady. The powers intertwine for an instant before Jack's voice brings Will back from the strange interaction.
"Doctor Lecter!"

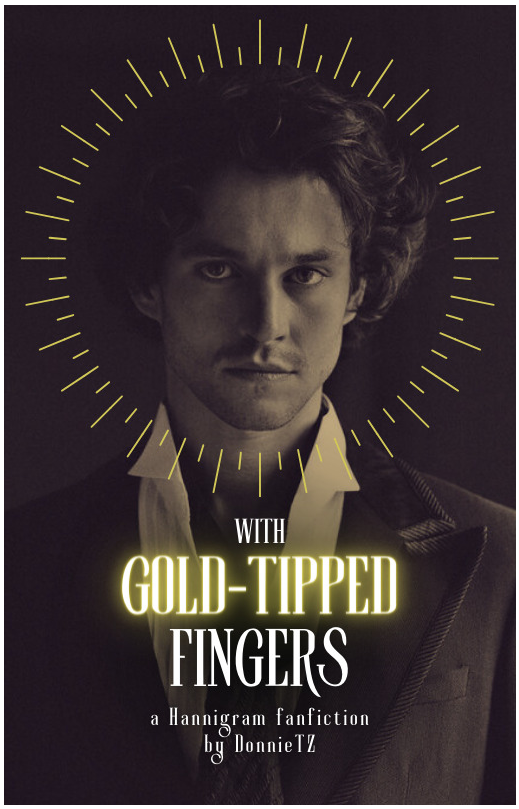
Notes

I have a vague idea of where this is going, but I'll find out more as I go. I just know I'll end up writing some magical edging. XD
Tags will be updated with each chapter.
I'm NOT a native English speaker so please feel free to send me messages with any mistakes so I can correct them, tnks.

Ready

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes



Will brace himself against the cold, the collar of his new coat high against the thin skin of his neck. The wool is rough, and his mind fixates on it whenever he tries not to worry about his future. The air smells of spices and magic, heavy with everybody's emotions. It's an electric buzz, a white noise that scratches Will's brain the wrong way.

Other people's magic fills him to the brim all the time, sure, but there's no place to dispel all that energy in the middle of the fair. It's exhausting. He feels barely kept together by his skin.

"Ready for it?"

Jack's voice brings him back to the present. It's deep and commanding, like every other time he addresses Will. And it's not really a question, even if it sounds like one. It's a demand, just as it was a week ago, in his study, when he explained to Will his whole future without taking into consideration his own plans.

Will better be ready because that's what is required of him.

What is *always required* of him.

So he doesn't answer and lets Jack lead the way towards the crowd. He startles when a gentle touch stops him.

"You don't have to do it, you know? You should be the one to choose."

Alana's smile is worried, her magic has a melancholic aftertaste. Will can feel it creep up his arm where she's touching him.

"Whatever."

It comes out acidic, and Alana lets him go immediately, her magic back under control. Usually, he welcomes her gentle connections, the sweet comfort of her powers, but not today.

"It's a good coven. You'll see. Hannibal will take care of you and your..."

She doesn't have a word for it. Nobody knows what to call it. A dark unshaped monster inside him, feeding off other people's magic. Jack finds it a necessary evil, a dangerous thing to keep locked until it's useful. To Will, it's just a curse.

He tries a smile but can feel it pulling at the corners, all distorted.

"If you say so."

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The celebration is in full force, despite the cold. People are laughing, chatting, eating from the stalls, moving on the dance floor to the sound of ancient folk songs, with leaves in their hair and smiles on their faces. It's all very lively, while Will feels one deep breath away from death.

The magic in the air grows louder, pushing against his skin like a violation. It would be so easy to just take it all, suck everybody dry, and let it build up inside of him until he's the most powerful of them all. But Jack trained him well: he suffocates the monster inside and doesn't take anything. He never does. Not until it's necessary for an investigation, not until Jack needs him to. His steps falter all the same under the pressure, but Jack doesn't stop to make sure that he's following.

They reach the blue marquee of their coven. Indigo and silver drapes all over the place, the scale crest on every surface to symbolise justice, and torches with cold flames in the same colours to light the tables and the stands. A group of little kids is asking for handshakes with the heroes. They can't wait to be twenty-one and do their mentorship under Jack, they can't wait to be heroes too.

Will feels sick.

Jack is welcomed as the important person he is. He smiles his public-relations-smile and pats shoulders like a proud uncle. Will is his shadow, like always.

He too is just a symbol of justice, but a less palatable one. People give him wary looks – curiosity without the bravery needed to approach.

“How is it going?” asks Bev, like someone who already knows the answer.

She’s the closest thing to a friend in Will’s life. Alana is always too worried – *about him* , *for* him – to be the friend he needs, and the other two in Bev’s group are still a bit diffident, even after ten years of sharing the same coven.

“We just got here. There’s still time for disaster,” Will murmurs, mindful of Jack's proximity even if he’s taken by other conversations.

“I saw Lecter. Their space is a feast like every year, all that gold and red… And they have a full pig! The Verger coven donated it, for whatever reason."

He wants to say that the reason is a power play, but they both know it. *Keep your friend close and your enemy closer* . Bev is just talking, it’s just rhetoric. Words to fill the space because silence is kinda scary.

Jimmy intervenes, using the same hushed tone.

“They’re nobility, what did you expect? Damn, even I can’t wait to have a look.”

“You’re a gossip, of course you want to take a look,” says Brian, appearing at his side, an affectionate smile on his face.

Lecter’s coven is rarely seen around, except for the annual fae ball they organize and gatherings like this one, where covens meet to keep relationships and traditions alive. They’re self-sufficient, they’re close-knitted, they’re powerful. Will envy their isolation, and that’s reason enough to follow Jack’s instructions, even if he doesn’t get to choose like everybody else.

“Who is Jack looking to mentor this year? Some talent we should expect to endure for the next twelve months?” asks Jimmy.

“He didn’t say. People will ask but… you know, it’ll be hard for them to convince him.”

Bev shrugs her shoulders. There’s no need to say why: Miriam Lass never survived her mentorship, never got to choose what coven to join after it, and never got to fulfil her dreams of heroism. Will was in the middle of his teenage years, longing to be left alone, but he vaguely remembers her. She was focused, smart, and kind when they crossed paths.

“Don’t let him hear you,” says Brian, looking at Jack’s back.

Bev and the others are holding hot drinks that smell like cinnamon, dressed in simple indigo and grey clothes, the tips of their fingers tinted blue against the glasses, the pigment sealed on the skin by magic.

Will look at his own hands, his own blue fingers, wondering how they'll look with another colour on their digits.

Flakes of gold, like Lecter's coven.

"Lecter has taken the Hobbs girl in, you know?"

The information is a punch to his guts, like the first time he tried a spell and it backfired. His breathing stops, his heart speeds. He wants to ask a myriad of questions. He wants to know how she's doing, if she's recovered, if she's happy with the new coven. But Jack ends his conversation and turns to reclaim his attention.

"Are you ready to meet Doctor Lecter, Will?" he asks, no more time to waste.

Bev raises her glass a little in a silent toast, Jimmy gives him a tentative smile and Brian nods in encouragement. On the other side of the crowd, Alana gives him a look of apprehension.

All their magics tastes like a goodbye.

"Ready," he says, and follows Jack in the chilled air of the fair.

Ready.

Even if he's not.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Kudos and comments give me dopamine, and dopamine helps me stay consistent because my brain is a needy brat.
For more hannigram drawings you can find me on twitter as artransparent.
❤❤❤

First touch

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal meet.
A lot of "magical flirting" ensues.

Chapter Notes

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your comments, kudos and bookmarks on the first chapter!!! I'm going to answer every single one of the comments now, but I wanted to post this chapter first. It's been an...*interesting* week, to say the least.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lecter's marquee has nothing of the stern austerity of Jack's. It's full of macabre decorations, skulls and leaves and red berries with a poisonous glint. Tables and stands are in polished dark wood with golden engravings, lit by what must be hundreds of candles. The food on the buffet is rich and decadent, a feast for all the senses. Will breathes in the warm air, tasting powerful magic and something ancient on his tongue.

A lot of the young-faced people in the crowd – in search of mentorship, just like Will – are there with their parents, dressed in refined clothes, impeccable hair and impeccable manners.

Now Will understands the need for a new coat and why they were late just to tame his curls.

"Agent Crawford."

Will looks in the direction of the voice and finds a beautiful blonde woman in a bright scarlet dress, standing there with what looks like a champagne glass in her golden-tipped hands.

"Doctor Du Maurier."

"Is this the bright young man you want Hannibal to mentor?"

She doesn't sound impressed, but she's not the one Will needs to impress. In fact, from what Jack has told him, he doesn't need to impress anyone, unlike all the other twenty-one-year-olds there. Doctor Lecter is already curious about him and willing to be his mentor.

"Yes. This is Will Graham, my protégé."

"Will Graham, slayer of monsters."

Her words are slow and measured, her composure flawless. Not enough for Will, though, because he can feel her magic prickling like burning coals, irritated. It's a cold brand of power, hers, a scalding iciness. He could take it all and leave her empty, he could make it all his, at least for a while.

He smiles, instead, hoping it doesn't look like a grimace.

Jack places a hand on his shoulder. "The one and only."

"I'll go search for Hannibal, then. He's eager to meet the boy. If you'll excuse me."

She walks away as if she's not wearing heels on the bare ground, while the way she said 'boy' rings in Will's ears.

"Let's take a look around."

Jack's hand stays on Will's shoulder, guiding him around while they inspect the stalls. There are potions, raw ingredients, delicacies of every kind, books, art. There is also a stand where they exchange handmade knives, and Will looks at a simple engraved blade that he could use for his rituals.

The pointy-faced guy behind the stall grins. "I made them."

While Will is considering asking Jack for it as a parting gift, a new kind of magic reaches out and brushes against his. It's dark, but it doesn't scare him. Or maybe just a little bit. It feels like something that can be dangerous but chooses not to, a deep lake in the middle of the woods at night, not to venture in but to admire from a distance. Will looks at the knives to resist the urge to gorge on it, drink it all in, and drown in it.

But he reaches out because it's too tempting. He pushes his magic in a tentative caress, slow and steady. The powers intertwine for an instant before Jack's voice brings Will back from the strange interaction.

"Doctor Lecter!"

Will turns and finds a tall man walking in their direction with an elegant stride. He's angular and perfectly groomed, his hair slicked back to show the perfect bone structure of his face. His eyes go from Jack to Will and focus for a few seconds, dark and searching. Will feels naked, stripped bare for his gaze, his magic a pulsing, living thing. He can almost feel the doctor's powers reach out and give a reassuring sort of squeeze, but to Will, it feels like a suffocating embrace. He fights it, and Lecter's smile sharpens.

A second later, the man is shaking Jack's hand as if nothing happened.

"Agent Crawford. It's nice to see you again. I'm glad you're considering what my coven has to offer."

"Oh, I'm impressed like every single year, Doctor. I'll probably exchange some of your delicacies. But I'm here to propose my protégé for a mentorship."

It’s another choreographed dance, nothing real about it. *Traditions* , some would say, but Will thinks they’re just lies. He’s still too distracted by the secret exchanges of their magic to talk, so he’s just standing there, shown off like he’s for sale, before Lecter’s attention goes back to him.

He holds out his hand and Will shakes it even if he feels too raw to touch, too sensitive. The contact almost overloads him, reverberating up his arm and into his brain. It’s vibrant, engulfing and so powerful.

“William Graham, I presume.”

“Just Will.”

“Not *just* . Never *just* .” Doctor Lecter lets Will’s hand go, still smiling his polite smile.

Jack seems satisfied with the man’s obvious curiosity, but there’s a protocol to follow.

“Should we discuss it further?” he asks.

“Please,” says Lecter, with an elegant gesture to point them toward a more private corner.

Some parents throw envious looks in their direction, others seem ready to kill for the opportunity that Will was given so easily. He feels their magic pushing and pushing, and he's relieved when they’re finally behind a set of crimson velvet curtains and he can put some distance between himself and their sour powers. They’re in a functional space, where a lot of the preparations for the fair probably took place, and Will registers details like it's a crime scene. Doctor Lecter must keep a tight leash on his coven, judging by how neat and clean everything is. All the goods and the empty boxes seem perfectly stacked and organized even in that temporary space, and a couple of red-dressed people behind a long table are keeping the cooking going on hot stone slabs and inside the fuming cauldrons. It smells divine, and Will realizes that his last meal was hours and hours ago.

Lecter’s magic seems to reach out again, sensing his hunger.

“Randal? Would you be so kind as to prepare a couple of plates for our guest?”

A young man eyes him with intensity and nods once. So they leave what must be considered the kitchen space and go further into the marquee to a little table with a few lit candles, obviously there for private conversations like the one they’re about to have.

“Are you considering a lot of candidates for this year?”

Jack removes his coat and takes the place Lecter offers. Will does the same under the watchful eyes of their host.

“Not at all," the Doctor answers. "William will have my undivided attention. I prefer to focus my efforts on one pupil at a time.”

“ Last one was the Teir boy, yes?”

“Indeed. Two years ago. And Brown before him, and Bloom five years ago.”

His expression becomes soft and proud, and Will’s stomach tightens. It must mean that Lecter didn’t have any apprentices for some of those years, which is very odd – even Jack, with his strict new selection, ends up with some young and naïve followers every year . And it seems only Alana didn’t stay with Lecter’s coven after her mentorship.

As if on cue, the young man with inquisitive eyes comes into view with a tray . Two plates, three glasses of red wine, and golden cutlery to eat.

“You’ve always gone all out on these occasions, Doctor.”

“It’s always a pleasure to see our people enjoy what my coven has to offer .”

“Oh, but it’s much more than the food, isn’t it?” says Jack, as an opening to discuss the coven’s strengths.

Randal is placing everything neatly on the table and Will thanks him in a whisper. He can feel the restrained wilderness of his magic, the caged animal inside of him. The guy nods again and leaves silently, like the domesticated predator he is.

“You seem to collect a lot of peculiar people,” interrupts Will, before taking the first bite of meat.

It melts on his tongue, buttery and seasoned to perfection. A little moan escapes him, but it’s covered by Jack’s reprimand.

“Will.”

“Let the boy speak, Agent Crawford. He’s right, after all.” And then, looking straight at Will. “My coven researches and preserves its fair amount of rare magic. We are the ones keeping our more obscure arts alive, despite the lack of usefulness.”

“No tracking rituals and elemental magic, then?”

Another bite, the meat warm and tender, the taste like nothing he’s ever had.

“Some, but that is not what your studies will focus on.”

Will eats and eats and feels there must be a secret hidden somewhere in the way Lecter is watching him consume his meal.

“What will they focus on?”

“Your… *peculiarity* , as you said.”

“He’s a fast learner.” Jack’s voice breaks the connection that Will was sensing once again. “And there’s no one more knowledgeable than Doctor Lecter,” he adds, looking at Will.

It’s a warning not to push, so Will shuts up and empties his plate, chastised. He resists the urge to reach out with his magic, to feel the connection on another level than the instinctual one of a few seconds before, but doesn’t. He feels like a boy, even if he hates it, so he lets them have their adult conversation about the details of his mentorship and the latest news of their world.

He thinks about fishing in the middle of a river that flows, surrounded by trees and the sound of nature.

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He’s brought back to the present by Jack. He’s standing, his coat back on.

“… alright ?”

Will blinks, trying to reconstruct a conversation he wasn’t aware was happening.

“What?”

“I said,” Jack’s patience already vanishing, “the choosing will start soon, and I have yet to make up my mind about a few candidates. Doctor Lecter invited you to stay. Behave, alright?”

Will nods, confused by Jack’s willingness to break even the smallest of traditions. Lecter, on the other hand, seems very satisfied with the decision. Will senses some residual magic in the air, but can’t quite place his finger on it, so he watches the two men exchange the last handshake.

And then, he’s alone with Doctor Lecter.

“Should we go back?” he asks as if being surrounded by strangers' magic is preferable to being alone with Lecter’s one.

“I believe it’s better if we have an honest conversation now, William.”

He wants to correct the man, he wants to say “It’s just Will’, but let it go. There’s no point, nobody ever listens, he learned it when his father left him with Jack and all the years after that single moment.

“About what?”

“About what agent Crawford wants me to do and what I will do instead.”

Will's interest is piqued. He leans towards the man, even if the table is a physical barrier between them. His magic stretches just like his body, touching Lecter with its invisible fingers. It’s like searching for a tender spot, the weak point where to push.

Are you lying?

“I didn’t realise the two were different.”

Hannibal smiles at him and there’s that self-satisfied expression again, between the lines of his face.

His magic surrounds Will’s one, embraces it and manages to calm its restless search. Their powers dance in the silence between them. *I’m honest* , Lecter’s magic seems to say. *Believe me.*

“You know, William, I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest china used only for special guests.”

Will laughs. It’s tired, forced, a scratchy sound more distress than fun. He wants to believe Hannibal Lecter so desperately, he wants to be led, taught, cared for, but he’s not sure he should let his guard down.

“How do you see me?”

The darkness in Lecter’s magic gets sharper. Will recognize excitement, a hint of obsession, and a lot more he can't quite pinpoint.

“The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Kudos and comments are powerful and their magic flirt with my magic. I may take my time to answer them, but I love every single one of them like Hannibal loves Will.
❤❤❤

The Joining

Chapter Summary

It's time for Will's Joining!
It gets... *intense.*

Chapter Notes

I know it's been a while. I'm sorry.
I'm very insecure about my English so it's frustrating not being able to write as I do in my first language. It's also impossible if I don't practice, so... here I am.
I'll try to update every couple of weeks (alternating between this and "the sweet spot" if I can).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s been a while since you last attended a Joining, correct?”

Doctor Lecter sits as if he’s in complete control. Of himself, of the space, of his people, of his powers. Maybe even of Will.

“Yeah.”

Will’s voice comes out rough, so he coughs and moves, suddenly uncomfortable on the chair.

“When was it?”

“I was twelve. My father had left me with Jack a few months before. But it was too much , I got overwhelmed. I don’t remember a lot about it.”

“I can imagine.” Lecter offers a soft caress of magic, but there’s a cryptic smile on his handsome face. “We will work on that.”

“It’s not something I can just… I don’t know, force to go away.”

“I don’t intend for you to force it away, William. I will teach you to not let it hurt you.”

It’s an impossible task , but there’s no point in telling him. It hurts all the time , it always has. Will can’t even imagine his life without that kind of ache.

“Why did your father leave you in Agent Crawford’s care?”

“You know it already.”

“I want to know it from you.”

Will's annoyance is beginning to show , he's sure of it. “Why?” he asks.

“Because Jack is a very pragmatic person , and he thinks other people see the world just like him: a contrast of blacks and whites. You, on the other hand, know the value of the in-betweens. Life is a chiaroscuro, after all.”

Will snorts. It’s pretentious and a bit condescending towards Jack, but he knows Doctor Lecter is right. Shades are the problem – *his* problem –, the point where everything mixes and it’s hard to tell right from wrong.

Lecter’s magic brings him back from that thought with something like a little tap, a bubble of power that pops between them.

“My father was scared. He was unaffiliated, he was a loner and he had very little power in him. I…”

He doesn’t know how to phrase it, but Hannibal looks at him like he’s something incredible.

“You’re full of power,” he supplies, voice soft.

“Yeah, I guess.” Will shrugs. “He thought I would be safer in a coven, with someone protecting me.”

“From other people as much as from yourself.”

Will senses someone’s magic before he can see who it belongs to. A young woman comes into view, her steps silent and her powers sharp.

“Your presence is required.”

“Thank you, Chiyoh.” Lecter gets up and buttons his suit jacket. “Would you mind escorting William to the public area?”

She nods once, and Will can’t help but think about her like a perfect soldier. It’s something in her magic and in her eyes.

“I’ll see you soon for the Joining then,” are Lecter’s last words, before Will is left alone with the woman.

She doesn’t speak to him, she barely acknowledges his presence, but she’s not overly hostile like Doctor Du Maurier has been. So he follows her to where they came from without a word. There, Will is left on his own. He explores, looks at the stands he couldn’t see before, tries to ignore all the eyes following him and the whispering and the buzz of magic.

“So, you’re Graham, right?”

The knife maker is standing too close , his magic reeks of morbid curiosity.

“I am. And you ar e…? ”

“Matt.”

Will hopes the conversation is over. It’s not like he doesn’t like the guy, but he definitely doesn’t like his attention and the odd pulse of his magic. It has something to do with blood, Will is sure of it. The ability to manipulate it. Draining it, maybe.

“Now , now , Matty, can’t you see the poor boy is nervous?”

Another man has approached and is now looking at them with a smirk on his face. His magic seems calm, a bit mischievous, but there’s something beneath that Will can’t grasp. Not dissimilar to Matt’s, his magic is about the body's ability to work properly. *Organs*. He can control other people's organs. Stopping them is such a powerful feeling that Will is almost lost in it.

“Doctor Abel Gideon, at your service,” the man says, with a little bow that feels like mockery. “You’re feeding your beast a bit, young man.”

Will realizes his curiosity has almost taken over, so he rains in his magic and apologises. Matt's powers vibrate with a mixture of fascination towards Will and irritation towards Doctor Gideon.

And Will tries very hard not to reach and take more from them, even if their showing off would make it so easy.

“I can talk to whoever I want,” says Matt.

“No, you can’t. Or have you forgotten about our dear Doctor Lecter?”

Matt throws Gideon a spiteful look, gives Will a longing glance, and goes back to what should be his duties.

“Does everybody hate everybody around here?” asks Will.

“Ah, hate is such a strong word. Let’s say that Lecter fosters a particular kind of competitiveness among us.”

“I don’t perform well against others.”

“That’s not what I heard.,” Gideon says. “That’s not what I *felt* , a minute ago.”

And with that, the man is gone, and Will feels already exhausted.

Lecter’s coven seemed like a dream just an hour before. Now, he’s not so sure.

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The gong echoes through the fair and every other sound stops . No more music, no more chatting. Even people's magic seems frozen in place.

It's time.

Will feels his anxiety like a physical constraint around his lungs and his breath comes out shattered and rough. He's not sure he can do it. Memories flash in his mind: him, small and fragile; the dark woods all around; a black creature with long antlers; his powers lashing out.

Pure, unadulterated fear.

He tries to breathe and not crumble under the pressure of his anxiety.

Everyone is walking towards the woods in small groups, the colours of the covens splattering all around like macabre paint in the dull lights of the candles. He should be with Jack's coven and yet he follows Chiyoh, Gideon and Bedelia like they're already a dysfunctional little family. How they can walk on soft ground and leaves with their elegant shoes is a mystery. Will is barely keeping up, but his legs tremble for different reasons.

They all reach the clearing with the big stone altar at its centre. It's already illuminated by the two twin flames in the braziers at both sides and full of bowls with pigments. The biggest bowl is filled with ever-clean water for the ritual.

All coven's leaders are near the altar in a line, powerful and still. Wil observes Hannibal's face and finds a neutral mask of politeness, his eyes searching the crowd. He tries to push his magic towards him, he doesn't even know why, and Hannibal attention snaps to him immediately. Their magics mingle for an instant : Will's is anxious and trembling, Hannibal's is reassuring and grounding.

Chilton starts to speak, his voice amplified by the sacred silence around him. He thinks too highly of his job and of the role of his coven . They're glorified bureaucrats, good for speaking at public rituals but too weak to host them. His magic-infused cane glows faintly in the night and carries his voice in a whiff of wind, the fingers around the grip a dull grey. To be able to infuse objects with small amounts of elemental magic is a minor power, but the man has always given the impression of believing the opposite.

He starts to call the head of every coven. They stand behind the altar and call their future apprentices. The minor covens go first and take their sweet time, being not that exclusive and aiming for quantity over quality to support themselves.

Will observes as every leader washes their apprentices' hands in the bowl, removing the preexisting pigment. Magic permeates the perimeter, fizzling on his skin. It hitches, burns, penetrates. He can feel it, there for the taking. It would be so easy. It would make him so powerful. His eyes dart back to Hannibal and he's still looking at him, focused and magnetic.

The exchange is abruptly broken .

“Oh, you wanted to be in Doctor Lecter’s one too?”

A guy at his side is unable to stay still. His round face is sporting a genuine smile after those whispered words.

“What?”

“You’re looking at him a lot. Doctor Lecter, I mean. I tried to be in his coven but it’s impossible to even speak to him . I would be a great asset, I know I will, but they’re set in their traditional ways, conserving rare magic and all that. I'll go with Chilton , it’s a respectable coven, but Lecter’s ... I mean, wow, right? Maybe at the Quinquennalia, he’d be more open. After I've proven myself and all that.”

Will doesn’t know what to say. It’s rare to change coven after the Choosing, even if the Quinquennalia is there for that very porpoise. Usually, it’s something granted to victims of abuse or for other very serious reasons. Not for silly infatuations.

Even if Will can understand this particular infatuation.

While he ponders his own curiosity towards Doctor Lecter, Chilton takes his position behind the stone altar. It’s his coven turn, and he calls a Franklin Devereaux with his posh voice. The guy at Will’s side goes for his Joining with unsteady steps on the soft ground, red-faced and unsure.

And then it's time for the more exclusive covens. Jack chooses just a couple of young people already staying at his side like good little soldiers. Mason goes for the beautiful and innocent-looking ones, leaving Will with a feeling of disgust deep in his stomach.

“Count Hannibal Lecter VIII,” says Chilton.

A chill runs up Will’s spine and settles at the base of his skull. Hannibal moves like a predator, getting behind the big altar like he owns the entire woods surrounding them.

“Will Graham.”

His accented voice reverberates through the surprised silence without the need for magic. Will takes the first step, then the second. It’s suddenly very warm despite the cold air, with everyone’s attention on him like a suffocating blanket.

He reaches Hannibal and stands at his side, feeling a bit like a human sacrifice.

“Breathe.”

The command is said in a soft voice, but it still pushes oxygen into Will’s lungs.

Hannibal takes his right hand, the contact intimate and drawn out. His magic is dark, incredibly powerful , and yet so quiet. No, *controlled* . He pushes Will’s palm in the warm water of the ritual and the blue pigment slowly vanishes. Will can feel it leaving his skin with

the protection of Jack’s, but it’s a liberating sort of goodbye. He feels free, under the anxiety and the effort to keep his own magic at bay.

“Stay with me, Will.”

“Where else would I go?”

Hannibal makes a small smile as if Will's prickliness is somewhat funny. He repeats the process of washing away the blue on Will’s other hand with the utmost care, his digits drawing patterns on Will’s skin. It’s not supposed to feel this intimate. It’s not supposed to erase the rest of the world from Will’s consciousness and leave him naked and hungry.

Then Hannibal pushes Will’s fingers deep into the little bowl filled with golden pigment and everything changes once more.

Will feels the belonging creeping up his arm, his shoulder, his neck. It gets inside of him and he *belongs, belongs, belongs.*

He's now protected by something ancient and invincible. Something that's pure magic, like nature, and equally destructive.

It's impossible to resist.

And so, he *takes* .

Hannibal seems to have a never-ending supply of magic, and Will drinks from it like a vampire thirsting for blood. He gorges on it, filling himself to the brim until he’s a God among men, something other than human, something immeasurable and inconceivable.

He *becomes* .

And it feels so good that a moan escapes his lips.

His other hand comes next and it’s simply too much to endure: all that magic leaves him in a rush and everything gets dark.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
I know I'm undeserving of kudos and comments since I disappeared, but I'd like them all the same!
❤❤❤

Cared for

Chapter Summary

Will, your daddy issues are showing...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The woods are deadly silent. The air around him is thick with ancient secrets and dark magic. Will should feel terrified, but he already survived once, when he was little and had no control over his powers.

Things are different now.

He is different.

He takes a step, then another, bare feet on the slimy ground and the smell of something rotten deep in his nose. Trees stretch towards him like burned fingers, all black and contorted, ready to snap and trap him.

He's watched.

He's being hunted.

"Show yourself."

His voice reverberates, sounding sure despite everything he doesn't know. Power crackles all around him, and he's tempted to take it and take it. But he knows the dangers of unknown powers, how easily they can take over and suffocate his sense of self.

"You're lost, boy."

The voice is coming from somewhere deep in the woods. It sounds sweet and caring, but there's something monstrous in its echo. Loud stomps follow, and the ground vibrates under Will's feet.

"Who…*what* are you?"

The creature that emerges from the trees is terrifying and imposing. Its antlers are big, and its skin is black. The structure of its skeleton is so clear under the epidermis that it seems on the verge of puncturing it and tearing it apart.

It's a man, and also something else completely.

Will takes a step back but doesn't run. He should feel terrified, he should fear for his life, but there's something familiar in the monster. Something he has always felt inside himself too. A comforting kind of darkness that leaves him surprised and nothing more.

The creature creeps near, pearl-white eyes fixated on Will. It lifts its long fingers and caresses Will's cheek with a scalpel-sharp nail, leaving a cold trail behind. Will shivers and he's not sure if it's the cold or something disturbing stirring inside him.

He licks his lips and tastes the beast's powers on the tip of his tongue. He wants to…

"Take," the monster murmurs.

And Will does.

He remembers this specific power, but it's a distant and blurry memory, with no shape to its outline. He absorbs it little by little, applying every trick to constrain himself that Jack ever taught him. The creature must grow impatient because it holds Will's face in a dangerous grasp.

"Take," it orders.

And, again, Will does.

No restraints, no cautions, no morals. He fills himself to the brim, overwhelmed with powers. No human should have that much. It's impossible to contain.

The monster gets nearer and bends to come face to face with Will, lips a breath away. It seems full of curiosity and fascination, and it's so close they may merge into one.

Will lounges to kiss without knowing why. He thought he was getting everything he could, but there's more. More power, more magic, a god-like omnipotence. He pushes against the thin mouth of the monster and tastes meat, blood and an impossible sweetness. He clings to the beast's shoulders and deepens the kiss, feeling the smooth texture of its peach-black skin and the decadent touch of its tongue.

They're *one*, and it's so good he's about to burst. He makes a needy sound in the back of his throat and the monster pushes him back against a tree. Its hands explore his body: back, arms, hips. It feels like it's reaching inside - heart, lungs, soul - and its craving stirs the urgent want in Will's belly. The creature is tender, but there's still a hint of danger in its worshipping. Will shouldn't be excited by it, but he can't find the willpower to stop.

It feels too good.

It feels… *right*.

So he lets the creature explore while he takes its magic and its desire until pleasure rushes through him. It explodes, it envelopes him, and it comes out with a cry that reverberates through the woods like a prayer.

***

Will wakes up in an unfamiliar place. The dream left him sticky and uncomfortable under the covers. He lifts them to assess the damage and falls back against the pillow with an exasperated sigh.

He needs a shower and a fucking exorcism. There's something wrong with his stupid head, he's sure of it.

But he also needs to know where he ended up. He looks around in the dim light of the room: everything is washed blue and grey by the night coming from the windows. It's a bigger room than the one he has at Jack's, with space to walk around and breathe. The walls seem made of stone, with dark lines where the slabs meet and a couple of creepy landscape paintings he can't see in detail. Furniture is essential but elegant, polished wood that Will can't really tell the real colour of. There's a wardrobe, a dresser, a desk and a bookshelf full of ancient-looking tomes. From the windows, he can see nothing but trees a couple of floors below.

He gets up and finally realizes that someone must have dressed him in the thin t-shirt he uses to sleep. No pants, so his legs break out in goosebumps under the boxers. It's cold, but there's the residue of warming magic in the air, a basic ritual that lasted hours and it's now gone.

A little door leads to a private bathroom. Will searches for the switch and finds an old-looking one near the sink. Warm light buzzes above the mirror, and Will's reflection is a stranger with dark circles under his big blue eyes. It's better not to look too much. It's better to run away from what lurks behind his pupils.

So he keeps exploring. The room looks old but well-kept, with a tub at the back complete with a shower head that promises to clean his body and purify his mind from uncomfortable dreams.

Will looks around for his suitcase and finds it empty under the bed, its contents perfectly folded in the dresser or hung in the closet. He chooses a change of clothes and hopes nobody will scold him for taking a shower in the middle of the night. It takes no more than ten minutes because showers at his old coven were not something to enjoy and he never learned how to. He uses the hand-made liquid soap from a jar left on a little stool near the tub, after smelling all the others and finding them too flowery for his tastes – or Jack's.

When he's clean and dressed in a big sweatshirt, he decides it's time to find some water and, maybe, some food. He knows he's on the second or third floor based on the view from his window but he's not sure he's in a castle until he opens the door and finds himself at the end of a long, stone-walled corridor. He knows they have electricity - they're not *that* traditional -, but he's not sure how to turn on the light or if he's even allowed to. So he cautiously proceeds for what feels like an eternity, one hand against the wall and eyes big in the semidarkness, his steps soft thanks to his fluffy socks. He tries to avoid paintings, vases of dried flowers, marble sculptures and macabre decorations made of bones hanging from the walls, relying on what little he can see and old instincts his father taught him.

He emerges on a balcony completed with two staircases that overlook a big entrance. Moonlight comes from big, pointy windows and lights up intricate carpets, ornate furniture and other statues resting in their hollows on the walls.

From somewhere comes the sound of ceramic and cutlery. He follows it downstairs, beyond a double door on the side, and finds himself in a well-lit and modern kitchen. It looks out of place in the castle, as does the girl sitting at the island with pyjama pants and a blue sweater instead of the long, white nightgown he expected a ghost to wear.

“Hi?” he says.

The girl almost jumps from the stool but settles as soon as their eyes meet. It’s Abigail Hobbs in all of her barely-survived glory. And fuck, Will’s not sure he can deal with this confrontation after all the emotions of his Joining and that stupid dream. But he’s also relieved to see her breathing, alive, sitting in a kitchen drinking hot milk.

“You must be Will Graham.”

She talks with a raspy voice and retrieves a foulard from the next stool to tie it around her neck. Her fingers reflect the light of the room with a golden glint while she moves. Like this, unguarded in the middle of the night, she seems even younger than the teenager she is. But they’re only four years apart, so he gets closer and tries to mimic an easiness he has never felt once in his life. “You don’t remember me?”

She shrugs. “I don’t remember much about that day.”

He could say he’s sorry, but it wouldn’t be true. But he also carries a peculiar kind of guilt, since she doesn’t have a father anymore because of him.

Will too is fatherless, after all.

Will too barely survived his teenage years.

He goes to the sink and tries to find some glasses.

“There,” she says, pointing him in the direction of a perfectly organised cupboard.

He fills a tall glass with tap water, drinks and buys time, studying her magic in silence. It’s alluring, manipulative, something more fitted for a trap in the woods outside than a modern kitchen. It also feels untrained and unsure.

He should go back to what is now clear to be his room, but he also wants to make sure she’s alright. Well, as alright as she can be.

Her voice takes him out of his head. “They say you passed out during your Joining.”

Damn, it’s already a gossip. He can almost see Jack’s disappointed face, Alana’s concern, people’s curiosity, Hannibal’s...

No, he can’t actually imagine his reaction.

He goes for a nonchalant act. “I pass out a lot.”

“They also say you’re powerful.”

“Who’s saying all these things?”

A sly smile spreads on her face, blue eyes sparkling with mirth. “Hannibal. *Mainly*. He updated the coven when he knew you’d come live with us.”

Will can feel the embarrassment creep up from his neck to his cheeks. He washes the glass to hide it.

“So you all live together?”

“Yup. Didn’t you live with Agent Crawford?”

“Well, yes, but... Not the other agents. They have their own houses around the headquarters.”

They have their own lives, unlike him.

Abigail seems interested. Maybe a bit *too interested*, as if there are other questions she wants to ask about Jack’s coven.

“Do you like living here?” he asks before she can speak.

She makes a bored little sound of agreement. “At least they don’t suspect me here.”

Will freezes, confused. “Who’s suspecting you? Of what?”

Abigail turns the spoon in her hot milk, taking her time as if they’re talking about the weather. “You don’t know?” she asks.

He wants to, so he shakes his head, droplets falling from his damp curls.

“Well, maybe you’re here to spy on me, who knows.” She seems detached while saying it, but her magic takes a worried shape. “Why don’t we talk about your powers, instead?”

Will can feel his expression grow confused and concerned on his face. *Is someone really suspecting her of something? Is that someone Jack?* He should ask, but he feels like she won’t give him a straight answer. He likes honesty, and she’s difficult to decipher. He also feels a connection between them, the possibility of friendship despite their first meeting.

“I don’t like to talk about my... *thing*,” he confesses, trying to be the first one to say the truth.

She doesn’t laugh, but the sound she makes is full of amusement. “Let’s make a deal then: you don’t talk about my father and all of that, and I won’t ask about your powers.”

He feels like he stumbled into some sort of trap, but he’s glad to agree to her terms since both topics of discussion are uncomfortable for him. He gets closer and offers his palm, so they can shake on it.

“You two should be resting.”

Lecter's voice comes from the door, surprising them while they're hand in hand. There's something caring in his remark and something soft in the way he's dressed in a red sweater and comfortable pants. They seem to expose almost too much of his big and solid body while revealing none of his skin.

Abigail gets up and places her mug in the sink. "I was about to go," she says, sounding like a teenager who's tired of her father's strictness and a grown daughter who doesn't want her father to worry at the same time. Will is following her without saying a word when Hannibal places a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

"You should eat something first, William."

Will looks at Abigail, but the girl is already saying goodbye with a silent gesture and a cryptic, knowing smile. She disappears beyond the door, leaving behind a faint trace of her magic.

Will's stomach decides to growl just to prove Lecter right, and the doctor makes a satisfied smile.

"I can eat some bread, it's fine," Will tries, but Lecter's reaction says it's the wrong hill to die on. He goes through disgust, disbelief and resolve in a matter of seconds, then guides Will to the kitchen island.

"In this coven, we care about what we put into our bodies. It's one of the most important and sacred rules."

Will almost laughs at the seriousness in his voice, but Lecter's magic reaches out in a soft caress and amusement dies in Will's throat. It's once again a caring and anchoring sensation, and still, it promises something deep akin to belonging. Will breaths out, tempted to take but content to be taken care of.

Nobody ever did.

Lecter's back is wide, his muscles moving under the thin sweater while he puts together what looks like a very refined sandwich. He cuts the curated meat with a slicer, the sound loud in the silent room.

"How does it work? Having enough food." Will moves on the stool, suddenly uncomfortable without knowing why. "Jack says you're a self-sufficient coven..."

"We are, for the most part. Some necessities aren't as easily crafted as food."

"So you go hunting?"

Imagining Lecter in one of the fancy suits he's known for crouched in the middle of the woods should be absurd, but there's something in his demeanour and in his magic that says otherwise.

He *is* a hunter.

He *is* a predator.

“Some of us do. Other fish or tend to our vegetable garden.”

Will sits straight, interest piqued. “I can fish.”

“So I have heard.”

Lecter turns, with an artistically composed Sandwich cut in half on a plate. Will takes it, his fingers brushing against Lecter's, and the small contact sends shivers down his spine. It’s because of the hint of self-satisfaction in Lecter’s power. *It must be* because anything else would be foolish.

And Will stopped being foolish at thirteen when he realized his father wasn’t coming back to get him and his life was now at Jack’s service.

“Eat,” Lecter encourages him. “We will discuss your role in this coven tomorrow.”

Will does and one single bite is enough to revive his spirit after the disastrous Joining and the creepy dream. Figs are sweet against the saltiness of the meat, and arugula crunchy against the spread cheese and drizzled honey.

“This is… incredible.”

Lecter sits near – too near – and hums in acknowledgement. His powers don’t fake the same humbleness, though, and spark as if Will has just ignited them.

“You like… no you *love* to cook for others,” Will realizes.

It’s a stated fact, but Lecter answers all the same. “Yes. Almost as much as I like to help them reach the full potential of their abilities.”

“Is that why you’re called a doctor?”

Lecter must found it funny because his smile grows teeth. “I specialised in the cure of magical afflictions. When someone’s magic is the origin of their problems, I’m the one they call for help.”

“It’ll be difficult with me.” Will sighs. “*I’m* difficult.”

“I can see this belief runs deep, but our time together and my efforts will prove you wrong.”

Lecter reaches out to touch his curls but stops an instant before contact. Will realizes it’s his way to ask for consent, and nods minutely. He wants to experience the reassurance not only in his words but in his touch. He *needs* it. Lecter’s warm hand caress him on the neck, where his hair is too long and still damp for the shower, and Will can almost make out the golden on his fingers and the darkness in his magic. He keeps eating and being touched, wondering what would feel like to stay and be cherished, appreciated and cared for all the time.

“Your thoughts are heavy.”

Will huffs a bitter laugh. “What? You feel them through my head? Is phrenology your power?”

“No. It's in your magic.”

Will shuts up, his face suddenly warm, and finishes his late dinner in one last bite. He folds his arm on the kitchen island and rests his head there, seated and coddled. Lecter takes back his hand to observe him. There is something in his maroon eyes, and the easiest way to know is to stroke his magic. Will does, and find it… happy.

To have him here, to feed him, to guide him.

“We shouldn’t feel each other powers like that. It’s too much. It was never that… *intense*, with other people.”

“Other people are nowhere near as powerful as you and I are.”

It’s true. It’s also worrying how good it feels to be considered in the same category as Lecter by the man himself. Will bites his bottom lip, wondering if he’s allowed to ask and deciding he doesn’t have anything to lose. “I can usually tell what other people’s instinctual magic can do,” he explains. “I can’t with you.”

Lecter gets up and invites him to walk together. It’s probably time for bed, even if Will would like this moment to never end.

“You’ll see…” it’s the only answer he gets.

Chapter End Notes

Once again *thank you thank you thank you* for your comments and kudos! It's so reassuring and heart-warming to read them and know for sure you're enjoying this! As much as writing this is fun, sharing it is nerve-wracking and your support helps, I mean it.
Anywaaaay, enough sappiness! See you as soon as I finish the next part!
❤❤❤

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